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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: LABOFF CONVEYS IMPORTANCE OF TRIPARTITE DIALOGUE AMID UNION'S ANTI-GON CRITICISM

¶1. (U) Summary: LabOff was a "Guest of Honor" for the Food, Beverage, and Tobacco Senior Staff Association's (FOBTOB) 11th Annual National Delegates Conference in Jos, Plateau State, on May 30. As one of Nigeria's largest private sector trade unions, FOBTOB used its annual Delegates Conference as an opportunity both to point out the harmful effects of the global economic recession as well as widen organized labor's harsh criticism against the GON for its failure to address several national issues, including trade liberalization, minimum wage, electoral reform, corruption, and the Niger Delta crisis. LabOff described our support for job growth, trade and investment support, and the need for a functioning tripartite dialogue in Nigeria, which drew praise from union leadership and other members of the more than 300 conference participants. End Summary.

¶2. (U) FOBTOB President Gabriel Babalola presided over the 11th Annual National Delegates Conference in Jos on May 30, which included LabOff as a "Guest of Honor" and more than 300 labor union leaders and members from the food, beverage, and tobacco industries. Babalola made it immediately clear that they are feeling the pain of the global economic downturn, specifically large scale layoffs in more than 18 companies and the complete shut down of five other corporations in the food and beverage industry. He also used the conference to slam the GON's trade liberalization policies, which he condemned for "dumping foreign products in the country, widespread unemployment, and weakened worker protections." Babalola reiterated the NLC's and TUC's public demands for a higher minimum wage, accusing the GON elites of "plundering the economy" through "parasitic, avaricious and self-centered" corruption. Babalola also discussed the GON's electoral reform policies, which he characterized as "unable to confer confidence and legitimacy." Finally, Babalola called on the GON to resolve the Niger Delta crisis via amnesty, echoing the pleas of his petroleum union colleagues who are affected most by the conflict, and demanding more security for their workers in the region.

¶3. (U) LabOff delivered remarks which conveyed Mission Nigeria's efforts to support job growth, trade and investment, as well as the USG's support worldwide for ILO

efforts to encourage tripartite dialogues (which include management, labor and government), and the need for such a functioning dialogue in Nigeria. He specifically pointed out Mission Nigeria's commitment to its Framework for Partnership with the people and government of Nigeria, highlighting trade policies, agricultural programs, and training, which has resulted in more than 58,000 jobs across the country. LabOff also recognized the contributions of organized labor and its role in promoting decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equality, and dignity. LabOff's remarks pointing out the utility of a structured, sustainable, and meaningful tripartite dialogue--mainly to find tangible solutions to Nigeria's most pressing labor issues--drew loud applause and later praise from several labor leaders and members in the audience. Ladi Iliya, NLC Vice President and Chair of the National Women Commission, specifically praised the remarks as "capturing the essence of the conference" and later told LabOff that "the appointment of 'Sister' Hilda Solis as Labor Secretary is a timely event that is going to make our movement proud."

¶4. (U) Comment: The Food, Beverage, and Tobacco Senior Staff Association (FOBTOB) is a major trade union affiliate, with 56 branches throughout the country. It was clear from FOBTOB President Gabriel Babalola's remarks that they were looking to widen organized labor's call for the GON to raise the minimum wage, as well as address other national priority issues such as electoral reform, corruption, and the Niger Delta. It was also clear from Babalola's remarks that despite Nigeria's weakened economic state, FOBTOB shares an excellent working relationship with the industry and several

ABUJA 00001212 002 OF 002

corporate Managing Directors in particular with whom it has amicably negotiated important labor issues in the past, such as working conditions and job protection. While this cooperation could provide a model for effective dialogue, FOBTOB's relationship with the GON is not nearly so collegial, being characterized by the GON's unresponsiveness to labor union concerns. End Comment.

¶5. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS